

Negative News is Good News

By Ron Wilson



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For more than a decade, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department has submitted samples from a percentage of hunter-harvested deer to out-of-state laboratories for testing for chronic wasting disease. So far, all results have returned negative.

The news for 10 years has been nothing but negative from out-of-state laboratories testing for chronic wasting disease. And that's exactly what North Dakota's wildlife managers want to continue to hear.

While CWD has been documented north, south, east and west of North Dakota in free-ranging or farmed cervid populations, nary a deer, elk or moose has tested positive in the state for the always fatal neurological disease.

Wildlife biologists began monitoring for CWD in North Dakota in 1998. CWD surveillance efforts have intensified over the years, and this year samples will be collected from hunter-harvested deer in the western third of the state. Moose and elk, regardless of hunting units, are also eligible for sampling.

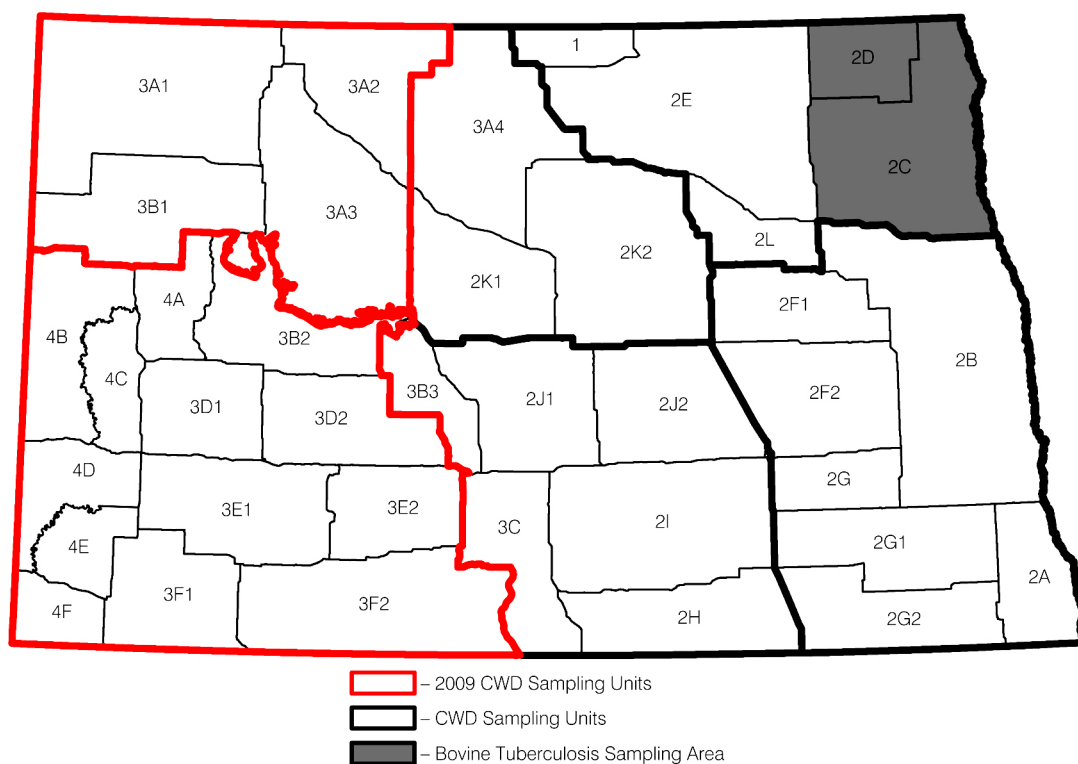
Dr. Daniel Grove, North Dakota Game and Fish Department wildlife veterinarian, said the Department received about 2,300 samples in 2008. About 1,600 of those were from hunter-harvested deer in the central portion of the state. While this number

of animals met Department testing demands, it provides just a snapshot of portions of the state each year. "It's important that we get the samples, and that wouldn't be possible without the help of hunters," he said. "I would hope that hunters have an interest in our CWD surveillance efforts, especially when we're sampling the area of the state they like to hunt."

The Game and Fish Department's CWD surveillance efforts are entrenched and will likely remain visible in hunting and wildlife management circles for years to come. "What we do now makes a difference today and years down the road," said Grove, who has also done CWD work in Wisconsin and Colorado. "We're managing our state's deer herd not only for next year, but for 20-30 years down the road."

Chronic wasting disease – named for its most evident clinical sign, progressive weight loss in infected animals – was first documented by scientists in Colorado more than 40 years ago. While much has been learned about CWD since the late 1960s, research

CWD SURVEILLANCE UNITS



continues on the disease that can be transmitted freely within and among free-ranging populations.

Grove said it was recently reported that scientists found prions, the infectious agent of chronic wasting disease, in the feces of nonclinical animals (deer not showing signs of the disease). This is significant, Grove said, because nonclinical animals are on the landscape longer, meaning they are more likely to

shed prions for a longer time period, which may increase the amount of environmental contamination, which in turn has the potential to infect more animals.

Grove said deer are coming in contact with the feces of other deer, infected or not, all the time. "It's on the landscape and deer are coming in contact with it at some level – they're eating feces while feeding,

Dr. Daniel Grove, North Dakota Game and Fish Department wildlife veterinarian, works to secure samples from a cow elk needed for chronic wasting disease testing. While a lot of the focus for CWD testing is on hunter-harvested deer, both elk and moose are also tested for the always fatal disease.



Deer Samples Negative for CWD, TB

Samples taken from North Dakota deer, elk and moose during the 2008 hunting season all tested negative for chronic wasting disease and bovine tuberculosis.

Last fall, samples for CWD testing were taken from nearly 2,300 deer (with 1,600 taken from the targeted area of the central third of the state), 53 elk and 24 moose. Altogether, 850 deer, moose and elk tested negative for bovine TB.

Since 2002, more than 12,300 North Dakota deer, nearly 360 elk and 60 moose have tested negative for CWD. To date, CWD and TB have not been diagnosed in wild or farmed cervids in North Dakota, although these diseases have been found in surrounding states and provinces.

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sniffing it, lying down in piles left by other animals, grooming other animals, grooming themselves ..." he said.

"What this means is that management schemes geared at detecting clinical animals may be missing nonclinical animals that are already shedding infectious prions," he said.

Understanding what the study has revealed, it's important from a management standpoint to prevent artificial congregations of deer in the state.

"The results of the recent study are yet one more indication of why we need to be concerned about unnecessarily concentrating big game animals in specific locations," said Randy Kreil, Department wildlife division chief.

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.



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This year, samples needed for testing for chronic wasting disease will be collected from hunter-harvested deer in the western third of the state. The North Dakota Game and Fish Department will have a deer head collection site manned in the Dairy Queen parking lot in Belfield the opening weekend of the season.



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CWD Surveillance

Samples from hunter-harvested deer from the western third of the state will be tested for chronic wasting disease in 2009. Also, all moose and elk taken in North Dakota, regardless of hunting units, are eligible for sampling.

Deer hunting units included in this year's surveillance efforts are 3A1, 3A2, 3A3, 3B1, 3B2, 3D1, 3D2, 3E1, 3E2, 3F1, 3F2, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, 4E and 4F. In addition, the Game and Fish Department will continue bovine tuberculosis testing by collecting samples from deer shot in units 2C and 2D in northeastern North Dakota.

To sample deer for CWD or bovine TB, the Game and Fish Department needs the head.

Every head sampled must have either the deer tag attached, or a new tag can be filled out at the collection site with the license number, deer hunting unit and date harvested. Skull caps and antlers can be removed.

Hunters whose deer have been sampled will have their names entered in a drawing for five muzzleloaders and 100 Sagen Saws. Winners will be randomly selected and notified by the end of December.

The Game and Fish Department samples the state over a three-year period. Animals in central North Dakota were tested in 2008. CWD monitoring efforts began in the state in 1998, but intensified in 2002.